

Serial No. 10/800580
Filed 03/15/2004
Request to reopen prosecution

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

In the Examiner's answer, the previous version of claim 1 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) on JP 2001-89990.

Claim 1, as amended, is limited to a transfer belt in which at least the exposed part of the fiber body is composed of hygroscopic fibers from the group consisting of vinylon fibers, rayon fibers, cotton fibers and wool fibers. The added limitation is supported by the applicant's expression of a preference for a hygroscopic fiber body having a moisture regain of 5% or more (in paragraph 0026), and the listing of "vinylon (5.0%), rayon (11.0%), cotton (8.5%) and wool (15.0%) in paragraph 0027.

In view of the amendment to claim 1, the limitation added by claim 2 no longer meaningful, and claim 2 has been cancelled.

In the rejection, the Examiner points out that Example 3 of the Japanese document teaches the use of a fiber layer consisting of nylon, and that the applicant's paragraph 0027 teaches the nylon is hydrophilic. It follows logically from these observations that the Japanese document describes a belt in which the exposed fibers are made from a material having a hydrophilic property.

The Japanese document, however, at best teaches the use of nylon, and claim 1 distinguishes the Applicant's

Serial No. 10/800580
Filed 03/15/2004
Request to reopen prosecution

invention from the Japanese document by listing vinylon, rayon, cotton and wool, thereby excluding nylon¹.

The above observations address the rejection under §102. However, it is appropriate to consider whether or not the Japanese reference demonstrates that the subject matter of claim 1, as amended, would have been obvious.

Concerning obviousness, it should first be noted that JP 2001-89990 does not make reference to any of the more highly hydrophilic materials specified in claim 1 as amended. The PTFE fibers, that JP 2001-89990 mentions for use instead of nylon, are on the hydrophobic side relative to nylon.

In Example 3, both in the Japanese document and in its U.S. counterpart, patent 6,319,365, the surface of the belt is described as "hydrophobic²," suggesting that the belt breaks up a water film because, although its entire surface is hydrophobic, some parts are more hydrophobic than others. How the nylon becomes hydrophobic is not entirely clear. Possibly, the nylon acquires some hydrophobicity as a result of contact with the silicone oil mixed into the resin that is used to impregnate the needled felt. In any event, in view of the emphasis on hydrophobicity in Example 3, it is not possible to find in Example 3 a suggestion of

¹ Nylon has a fiber regain of only 4.5% (spec. par. 0027)

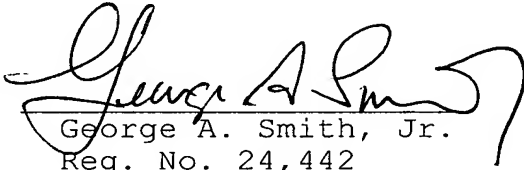
²In the Japanese document, the "wet paper web installation side 2b is hydrophobicity." The U.S. patent refers to "the surface layer exposed portions 3'," which are clearly the exposed parts of the fibers, as "being hydrophobic" (col. 9, lines 65-66).

Serial No. 10/800580
Filed 03/15/2004
Request to reopen prosecution

utilizing a fiber more hydrophilic than nylon. And, there is nothing anywhere else in the two documents that suggests using a fiber more hydrophilic than nylon. Thus, we submit that claim 2 not only distinguishes the invention from JP 2001-89990 in the sense that there is no anticipation, but also defines subject matter that is not shown to have been obvious.

Reconsideration of the application and allowance of claim 1, as amended, are respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,
HOWSON & HOWSON LLP

By 
George A. Smith, Jr.
Reg. No. 24,442
Howson & Howson LLP
Suite 210
501 Office Center Drive
Fort Washington, PA 19034

Telephone: 215 540 9200
Facsimile: 215 540 5818